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Un pajarito de papel en el pecho / Dice que el tiempo de los besos no ha llegado

Sex work and the Senate: Swedish meatballs

Posted on [14 September 2013](#)



— Ny spännande möbel från IKEA! Med IKEAs nya PERVERS ställning kan man hotta upp sitt sexförhållande. Go ahead, translate that.

There was a time when “the Swedish model” meant either [some girl](#) who was dating Leonardo DiCaprio, or a literary anthology of IKEA [assembly instructions](#). Those were innocent days. Now it’s all about sex, and not of the unthreatening DiCaprio variety. Specifically, it refers to what Swedes call the *Sexköpslagen* or Sex Purchase Law, a 14-year-old act saying that no man can *hotta upp sitt sexförhållande* with the use of money. The provision criminalizing the buyer but not the seller of sexual services has become a pattern for pushing legal [repression elsewhere](#), including Canada, England, Scotland, and most recently [Ireland](#). Now even the US Senate is under its influence.

David Vitter is a boringly conservative Louisiana Republican. For the most part, he’s there to [vote for](#) whatever the oil industry tells him to, though he spikes up the monotony a bit by fighting same-sex marriage, crusading against gambling, and getting lewd women to dress him up in diapers.



— Vitter in adult clothing

The latter propensity started to make headlines during his first term in the Senate, in 2007. First his [phone number appeared](#) in the records of Deborah Jeane Palfrey, the “DC Madam,” a former paralegal who ran an expensive Washington escort service. Vitter more or less [admitted](#) things, in ritual fashion: the press conference, the sobbingly supportive spouse, the claim that “I asked for and received forgiveness from God and from my wife in confession and marriage counseling.” Back in New Orleans, another madam claimed him as a client going back to the 1990s, and another source said he was known around the House of the Rising Sun for [his diaper fetish](#). This wasn’t the first time such stories had surfaced. In 2002, he dropped out of a race for governor, citing “marital problems,” [in the face of](#) a magazine story

detailing his relations with a sex worker.

When I was 18, I stayed for a week in Metairie, Louisiana, a suburb of Noo Awlins where the Vitters (David, Wendy, and four kids) maintain their happy home. (Mrs. Vitter once [told the press](#) about the possibility of an extramarital affair: “I’m a lot more like Lorena Bobbitt than Hillary. If he does something like that, I’m walking away with one thing, and it’s not alimony, trust me.”) A heterosexual friend of mine had moved down there, ostensibly to teach school but actually for the thriving sex scene. I helped him fill his waterbed, something I have never done before or since, and then he proceeded to max out five credit cards on wide varieties of illegal escapades while I read all of Tennessee Williams on the back porch. There were so many sex shops and massage parlors in the neighborhood that I saw neon even with my eyes closed. There’s a reason they call New Orleans the Big Easy, and that’s probably also a reason Vitter got himself re-elected, and still sits in the Senate lubricating things for Big Oil. Despite Wendy’s unsubtle threat, she doesn’t even seem to have made meatballs of his genitalia.

Vitter’s latest crusade is that obsession of the Republican right, defunding Obamacare. For the last week he’s been on the Senate floor full-time, demanding a vote to strip Senate and White House staffers of federal contributions to their health care coverage. In retaliation, Senators are discussing [a draft law](#) targeting *him*. It would prohibit any federal contribution being given to a lawmaker or an aide if a congressional ethics committee has “probable cause to determine” that the person has “engaged in the solicitation of prostitution.”

This is, although the Senators probably don’t know it, the Swedish model in action: punishing what proponents like to call “[the demand side](#) of prostitution.” And you have to admit it’s delicious in the case of Vitter, whose time spent on the demand side has been so long and so hypocritical. The man is really shameless. Just a few months ago, he introduced [an amendment](#) to strip certain classes of convicts from the right to receive food stamps *ever* in their lives. He said it would keep the Federal government from helping “convicted murderers, rapists, and pedophiles” not to starve. Oddly, the crime of soliciting for prostitution was not on the list. Even if David goes to the Stockholm slammer for his excursions someday, he can always rely on welfare.

This comes, moreover, just days after another guy has been punished again for taking a walk on the demand side once too often. Eliot Spitzer, formerly known both as Client No. 9 and as Governor of New York, tried to resurrect his political career by running for Comptroller of New York City. He had resigned the governorship five years ago, if anyone doesn’t remember, after he was discovered to have patronized another DC escort agency during repeated visits to the nation’s capital. He lost the race: redemption denied.

All the same: *why* exactly are these guys being punished? After all, in the simple act of paying for sex, Vitter and Spitzer injured no one — with the possible exception of their wives, whose long-suffering loyalty is a private matter, not a public one. Much as one appreciates the Democratic Senate’s sense of irony, if you routinely punished every Congressman, or his member, for “improper conduct reflecting discreditably” on Congress, there would be no Congress. The only hurt they did was in their hypocrisy. And the true lineaments of this hypocrisy, alas, are the last things for which they’ll face consequences.

We expect right-wingers to be two-faced; but the left-wing strain of progressive Puritanism running Spitzer’s career was arguably more dangerous — and popular. He had long tied himself to anti-trafficking militants committed to making life miserable for both sex workers and clients. As state Attorney General, he let the eradicationist group Equality Now [goad](#)

him
into a
years-
long



— But not the Governor: Poster shaming accused johns in Nassau County, NY. Please ignore the fine print.

campaign of harassment against a travel company that marketed sex tours. He drove the firm out of business, but a trail of frivolous, dismissed indictments and acquittals left the case looking like a huge waste of time and taxpayers' money. As Governor, he signed an extra-tough "anti-trafficking" law, with the Swedish model in mind, that massively increased penalties for soliciting prostitution (exactly what he was doing at the time) while maintaining penalties for sex workers as well. But what folks hate Spitzer for is having bought sex, not the repressive policies he promoted. Paying women is offensive; persecuting them, fine. Called out for "immorality" during his last campaign, he actually had the nerve to cite his crackdown on consensual activities in his own defense.



— Spitzerfreude

All this brings to the fore two facts about the Swedish model.

First: *It doesn't work.* It doesn't "discourage demand." If public exposure did that, then David Vitter, who was first accused of frequenting sex workers in 2002, would have stopped then, long before his political career almost crashed to a halt in 2007. God knows what he's doing now — his wife sounds like the kind of woman who'd charge for her tearful endorsement by making the man wear a permanent ankle monitor. But the very fact that he continues unrepentant on his moral crusades indicates some basic lesson hasn't been learned. And as for Spitzer, Melissa Giri Grant notices that his anti-trafficking law "didn't stoke enough stigma to stop even the man who signed it from going to a prostitute."

There is, in fact, no evidence that Sweden's own *Sexköpslagen* has brought down the demand for prostitution, or saved people from trafficking. A recent official evaluation of its results, as Laura Agustin has demonstrated, produced no credible evidence on either score. It's a classic law that enables legislators to feel good about themselves, while leaving the situation that initially disturbed them undisturbed.



— The good wife: David and Wendy Vitter in press conference, 2007

Second: *The people the model hurts are sex workers themselves.* As Grant [says](#), [stigma](#) “can’t be harnessed and directed, or isolated only to the men who buy sex. Under ‘end demand’ policies, sex workers are as stigmatized as they long have been, and [they still face violence](#) from the public and from police.” The Swedish government’s own report [acknowledged](#):

The people who are exploited in prostitution report that criminalization [of clients] has reinforced the stigma of selling sex. They explain that they have chosen to prostitute themselves and feel they are not being involuntarily exposed to anything. Although it is not illegal to sell sex they perceive themselves to be hunted by the police. They perceive themselves to be disempowered in that their actions are tolerated but their will and choice are not respected.

Women are still swept up in police stings targeting their clients, publicly humiliated and detained. Yet, the report said, this negative impact “must be viewed as positive from the perspective that the purpose of the law is indeed to combat prostitution.” There’s the rub: Combating prostitution means combating prostitutes. It always does.



— Fighting back: Sex workers rally in Kolkata, India, July 24, 2012. They participated in an alternative International AIDS Conference in protest against US visa restrictions that prevented their attendance at the main conference in DC.

Spitzer suffered some for his deeds, but the women underwent far worse. As it happens, Kristin Davis, a madam arrested in a crackdown that followed the Spitzer scandal, wound up in the race against him for Comptroller this year, running as a Libertarian. She said she wanted [to ask him](#)

If he thought it was fair that he was never charged as a john under his new felony law but that I spent four months in Rikers Island from which I returned penniless, homeless, and forced to take sex offender classes for five months with pedophiles and perverts while he returned to his wife in his Fifth Avenue high rise without ever being fingerprinted, mug shot, remanded, or charged with a crime under the very law he signed.



— Deborah Jeane Palfrey, 1956-2008

Even if the “Swedish model” ostensibly lets the hookers off the legal hook, a panoply of other laws are regularly used against them. Spitzer’s downfall [started](#) because the Patriot Act mandated tracing suspicious or potentially unlawful bank activity. That radically ramps up the surveillance of sex workers. But money-laundering and related charges have been levelled against sex work enterprises for years. In 2008, a jury convicted “DC Madam” Deborah Jeane Palfrey not of prostitution, but of money laundering, using the mail for illegal purposes, and “racketeering.” The crimes carried a maximum of 55 years in prison. Palfrey [killed herself](#) before sentencing. One of her former employees, Brandy Britton, on trial for four counts of prostitution, had also [committed suicide](#) the year before.

And Vitter stays in the Senate. Another powerful man waylaid by the “DC Madam” scandal was Randall Tobias. He resigned as George W. Bush’s AIDS coordinator when his number turned up in the case — though he claimed he’d only called the girls for a massage or two. Tobias had been a key promoter of the Bush administration’s

pro-abstinence policies. A year before his downfall, he [said](#), in an interview about the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), that

The Congress I think very appropriately has put into the legislation that created this program that organizations, in order to receive money, need to have a policy opposed to prostitution and sex trafficking. I don’t think it’s too difficult for people to be opposed to prostitution and sex trafficking, which are in fact two contributing causes to the spread of HIV/AIDS.

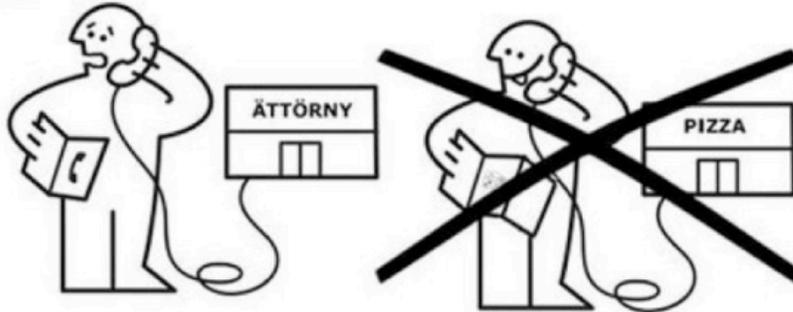
Unindicted and not too badly damaged, Tobias — a former drug-company CEO — continues to circle through corporate boards. The evil that men do lives after them. The requirement that no organization sympathetic to sex workers’ rights could receive PEPFAR money remained securely ensconced under the Obama administration, until the Supreme Court finally [overtured it](#) this June. Sex workers around the world paid for Tobias’ hypocrisy with their human rights, their health, and their lives. *That’s* exploitation; that’s the raw deal.

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— In event of arrest: IKEA instructions

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2 THOUGHTS ON "SEX WORK AND THE SENATE: SWEDISH MEATBALLS"



Sarah

on **14 September 2013 at 02:29** said:

The IKEA instructions are priceless. Who are they by?



Bella Robinson

on **14 September 2013 at 07:19** said:

Since they can't seem to police even 1% of the sex industry on a good day in any country, why would they think they can regulate it or that criminalization does anything to stop prostitution. As a consenting adult I do not feel the government has any right in my personal affairs. Criminalization creates the perfect playground for predators and bad cops to rob, rape, threaten, exploit and murder sex workers. Here is UTTER proof that the anti trafficking narrative is purposely misinforming the public and the data came right off US federal websites yet they spin a much different story in the main stream media.

http://www.policeprostitutionandpolitics.com/pdfs_all/Truth_about_sex_trafficking/Cops_prostitutes_child_sexual_exploitation_Sex_Trafficking.pdf

To hear from the mouths of US sex workers UNCENSORED please see

<http://www.americancourtesans.com>

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